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ABSTRACT

This study explored parental influences on the achievement of eight gifted and talented adult women from culturally diverse backgrounds. Qualitative methodology was used to conduct the study. The past experiences of the female participants were examined in light of the components that shaped their behaviors and choices to produce achievement outcomes. The major theme was the determination of the parental influences that participants believed helped them achieve successfully during their early childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. Data show that parents of these participants had high expectations and provided support and frequent words of encouragement along with continual guidance. Recommendations for practice and suggestions for further research are also included. (Contains 25 references.) (Author/SLD)

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Achievement: An Exploration of Parental Influences on Gifted and Talented Females from Culturally Diverse Backgrounds

Paper Discussion
by
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Presented
at
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An Exploration of Parental Influences on Gifted and Talented Females from Culturally Diverse Backgrounds

by

Mary Elizabeth Henderson

Abstract

This study explored parental influences on the achievement of gifted and talented females from culturally diverse backgrounds. Qualitative methodology was used to conduct the study. In addition, a cultural-ecological approach (Kitano, 1998) was a natural part of the methodology framework. The past experiences of the female participants were examined in light of the components that shaped their behaviors and choices to produce achievement outcomes.

The literature that served as a foundation for this study was based on the following precepts: the importance of achievement for all children, the importance of parents encouraging gifted and talented females, and problems in achieving that have been experienced by females.

The major theme was, "What parental influences did the participants believe helped them to achieve successfully during their early childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood?" The data from the interviews produced the following results: (1) Parents had high expectations, (2) The participants made frequent references to the support they had received, (3) The participants received frequent words of encouragement, and (4) The parents provided continual guidance for them. This study contributes to the literature in the areas of achievement and parental influences.

Achievement:
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INTRODUCTION

What evidence has been presented to indicate that parental influences have a direct connection to the achievement outcomes of gifted and talented females from culturally diverse backgrounds? Additionally, do females, especially gifted and talented females, require special nurturing and support from their parents, even though they are highly intelligent and it is assumed that they will be successful achievers? According to Campbell (1995), exceptional parents with well-organized plans who nurture, support, and enforce their gifted children's efforts exist, and because of this, their children become high achievers. Kerr (1994) suggested that the achievement stages of children should not be left to chance, although many parents and educators believe that if children have been identified as gifted or talented, they will not have difficulties achieving. Unfortunately, the statistics reported by Mandel and Marcus (1995) and Rimm (1995) indicated that the number of underachieving gifted students had escalated, and parents were perplexed. The purpose of this study was to discover what parental influences were present during the developmental stages of some highly achieving gifted and talented females from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Parental influences reach far beyond the infant stage of children to embody three areas of human development, specifically early childhood,

adolescence, and young adulthood. This study targeted these three areas of development while exploring parental influences on the achievement of gifted and talented females from culturally diverse backgrounds. During the course of the study, the past experiences of gifted and talented female participants were examined in light of the components that shaped their behaviors and choices to produce achievement outcomes.

Some of the participants in the study were identified through a "Municipality Achievement Program for Women;" others were selected as a result of having observed their talents, leadership position, and skills in the workplace and in the community. The researcher was also guided by definitions of giftedness based on Renzulli's (1986) "Three Ring Model," Sternberg's (1997) implicit theory of giftedness, and Gardner's (1985) multiple intelligences theory.

Qualitative methodology and narrative inquiry were used to conduct the study. In addition, a cultural-ecological approach (Kitano, 1998) was a natural part of the methodology framework. The data collected from the interviews produced the following major findings: (a) the parents had high expectations, (b) they were very supportive, (c) they offered encouragement, and (d) they provided continual guidance. Other findings suggested that the participants had role models and enjoyed reading.

Research Questions

The study was designed to discover the answers to the following questions:

. What parental influences were co-existing during early

childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood to help gifted and talented females from culturally diverse backgrounds achieve successfully?

. To what extent did the participants believe their parents' influence helped them to become successful achievers?

Significance of the Study

This study may add new information to the theoretical literature to help parents guide their gifted and talented female children to greater achievement outcomes. In addition, this study served to validate the existing literature that pertained to parental influences and the achievement of gifted and talented females.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to the literature and research that referred to parental influences, achievement, and gifted and talented female participants from culturally diverse backgrounds. Additionally, to complete the research, the study was limited to the following methods and components: qualitative methodology and a cultural-ecological approach.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

Four major components formed the framework for the study. They included: (a) the cultural-ecological approach (Kitano, 1998), (b) reversing underachievement of females (Davis & Rimm, 1998; Ford, 1996; Ford & Harris, III, 1999), (c) underrepresentation of gifted females (Davis & Rimm, 1998; Kerr, 1994; Noble, 1988), and (d) the role of parents (Davis & Rimm, 1998; Ford, 1996; Fuller, 1988; Johnson, 1984; Rhodes, 1994).

Cultural-ecological approach

The first major component was based on a modified cultural-ecological approach. According to Kitano (1998), research conducted within this framework addresses a group's cultural strengths in developing coping strategies to sustain achievement efforts. A cultural-ecological perspective examines the characteristics of the individual, the immediate environment (family, school, workplace, and broader sociohistorical), and significant others who influence socialization. This approach was used in examining the social and professional lives of the participants in this study.

Underachievement of gifted females

The second major component explored the dilemma of the "underachieving gifted female." "The underachieving gifted child represents both society's greatest loss and its greatest potential resource" (Davis & Rimm, 1998, p. 278).

Underrepresentation of gifted females

The third major component focused on the underrepresentation of gifted and talented minority females in the gifted programs and the need for all children to achieve to their full potential. For many years, most of the research focused on the need to identify gifted minority children through testing, rather than expounding on the need to help them achieve to their full potential (Ford, 1996). Although Sternberg's triarchic theory (Sternberg, 1997) and Renzulli's enrichment triad model (Renzulli, 1984) are two methods used to help identify minority children, Kerr (1994) noted that the giftedness of many minority children is obscured by the physical and

psychological effects of poverty and inferior schooling.

Role of parents.

The fourth major component that is relevant to this study examined the role of the parents and the parents' influence on the achievement of gifted and talented females from culturally diverse backgrounds. The significance of parents in nurturing the abilities and potential of their children at an early age helps the children to be successful during adulthood (Johnson, 1984). Further, the role of parents in this respect does not cease when children enter formal school; they must continue by becoming partners with teachers in the educational process (Ford, 1996). Fuller (1988) stated that sensitive nurturing is the most important aspect in the development of young talent, even more than genes or overly aggressive parents.

The epistemological underpinnings of the components previously cited have relevancy when combined, and served as a framework to research the influence that parents had on the achievement of gifted and talented adults, age 20 or older.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A brief overview of the literature pertaining to the research question(s) on gifted and talented females has been included as a means of establishing the current state of knowledge in the selected subject area. The following sections have been included: (a) the importance of having all females achieve, (b) the importance of parental support for the gifted, and (c) research on gifted and talented females.

The Importance of Having All Females Achieve

Women's struggle for equal treatment in the social, political, economical, and educational systems has been scrutinized by the public for over a century now. The American Association of University Women (AAUW), through its public policy program, has delineated this inequality and, in so doing, it has provided some of the most important reasons why women need to be about the business of achieving. AAUW's Public Policy Action Priorities for 1999-2001, accepted unanimously by the organization's 50 state leadership, are cited:

- To support a strong system of public education that promotes gender fairness, equity, and diversity;
- To achieve economic self-sufficiency for all women;
- To guarantee equality and individual rights for a diverse society. (AAUW, 1999)

In addition, the importance of women's achieving can be extracted from the comments of former U. S. Labor Secretary Alexis Herman. Speaking at a business session, Secretary Alexis Herman described efforts to close national gaps in skills, opportunities, and pay for women. She focused specifically on the pay received by women, which amounts to American women earning 75 cents for every dollar earned by men. In addition, she noted that this amount translates into a pension gap and a Social Security gap that hurts women long after they leave work (AAUW, 1999, p. 8).

The Importance of Parental Support for the Gifted

Raising a child is not an easy task. Rhodes (1994) emphasized that most people who become parents do not have any formal preparation for the role

of parenting, except for the models their parents offered. However, parenting a gifted and talented child is an even greater task, since the needs and characteristics of the child are usually different from other children. Another concern that was presented by Webb, Meckstroth, and Tolan (1994) alludes to the belief by many parents that they only need to shower their gifted daughters with love in order to produce successful achievers. It is extremely important to show love to children, but just loving them is not enough. As in other jobs that require management roles, parents have to know what they are doing. Campbell (1995) reported that parenting for the gifted child, as well as all children, requires nurturing skills from the time the child is born throughout their schooling. It also requires high expectations, and a realization that what is done or said is crucial in raising children to their full potential. The report noted, in addition, that the most important element enabling the child to realize the accomplishment of a high-level academic performance goal was the large amount of quality time the parents spent with their child over her or his entire school career.

Parental support to maximize achievement is possible through effective modeling. Bandura (1962), a pioneer learning theorist, formulated the concept that children needed models to imitate, and that abstract modeling accounted for a great deal of conceptual learning, including the concepts investigated by Piaget (1970). Rimm's Law #2 (1995) stated:

> Children can learn appropriate behaviors more easily if they have effective models to imitate. This is a most critical element of parenting toward achievement. Not only should parents themselves be achievers, but they must share with their children

realistic and positive views of achievement. (p. 124)

Davis and Rimm (1998, p. 124) suggested "parenting by positive expectations." If high achievement, constructive behavior, and positive attitudes are reinforced by parents, the child will internalize this information. By modeling achievement, parents are assisting their children's motivation to achieve.

Research on Gifted and Talented Females

The gifted and talented females of this study were highly accomplished individuals from culturally diverse backgrounds. However, during the course of their development and accomplishments, they encountered varying degrees of difficulty, as do many other females.

The struggle that many females endure to reach their achievement pinnacle is an ongoing process, and when these females are gifted, talented, and culturally diverse, the struggle is compounded. This struggle comes from the inability of a number of females to create a feasible achievement path; consequently, the ineptitude to achieve specific goals places the female population as a whole at risk in the educational, professional, and economic system. The major source of this risk stems from underachievement difficulties during childhood and adulthood, gender differences, psychological factors, peer pressure, and a system that does not properly identify gifted and talented children (Ford, 1996).

Underachieving Gifted Students

The words, "underachieving gifted student," seem to be contradictory or paradoxical. If an individual is gifted, how could he or she be

underachieving? Nevertheless, during this decade, the word "underachievement" has been defined or described by several authors: Mandel and Marcus (1995) defined underachievement as a significant gap between a student's potential and performance; Rimm (1995) described the symptoms of the underachievement syndrome as inadequate school performance by capable children; Whitmore (1980) stated that underachievement could be defined as academic performance that is significantly lower than predicted, based on some reliable evidence of learning potential. She added that the first reason educators need to identify gifted underachievers is due to the loss of potential contributions to society from those individuals.

Gender Differences

Davis and Rimm (1998) proposed that gender differences in underachievement may not be biological in origin, but culturally based. They stated:

> The pink or blue blanket that identifies gender differences almost at birth is the first step in giving differential direction to the sexes. Next comes the infant's nursery, with pastel colors, lace, frills, and dolls for girls and bright colors, heroes, spaceships, and dump trucks for boys. The expectations of docility and conformity for girls throughout early childhood initiate the gifted girl to her eventual underachieving role in society. (Davis & Rimm, 1998, p. 320)

Despite the impact of the women's movement and the recent Title 1X programs advocated on behalf of females by the American Association of University Women (AAUW, 1999), gifted females continue to face conflicts

when they are faced with resolving society's expectations of them as women and as gifted people. Many times, gifted girls have to deal with the biases of educators who are slow to identify them as bright. A similar dilemma exists for gifted minority students.

Underrepresentation

While endeavoring to achieve their talents and interests, many gifted minority females are not recognized as being gifted, get caught between two cultures, become vulnerable to peer pressure, and suffer from psychological consequences (Campbell, 1995; Davis & Rimm, 1998; Kerr, 1994). According to Kerr et al. (1992), a few studies have been done on minority gifted children, and most of these studies identified the minority gifted children through testing. Schmitz and Galbraith (1985) believed that sometimes gifted minority students are not recognized as talented, primarily because their gifts lie in areas that are celebrated by their ethnic group but not by Western society standards. For example, many minority gifted are talented in humor, dance, imagery, and creativity. Campbell (1995) stated, "Ethnic groups without the valued tradition of literacy do not suffer from a dearth of superior genes but, rather, lack the environment needed to nurture the growth of talent" (p. 9). Webb, Meckstroth, and Tolan (1994) observed that gifted children include persons from all ethnic groups and lifestyles. They also emphasized that environment clearly has an impact on intelligence, and intelligence can be heightened through nurturance and hindered through neglect and abuse.

Gifted and Culturally Diverse

While discussing culture and achievement, Gardner (1985) stated the following: "It is the culture that defines the stages and fixes the limits of individual achievement." It fosters personal development through norms, values, and practice. However, in its initial phase, this personal development begins at home with the parents.

> The child is engaged in obtaining symbolic skills according to the symbolic channels favored by this culture, whether it is dance, rituals, or education...It is given to only a few individuals in most cultures to reach the apogee of symbolic competence and then move on to attempting to devise a new symbol system. (Gardner, 1985, pp. 310-311)

In addition to defining the stages and limits of individual achievement, each culture defines giftedness in its own image. Giftedness in one culture may not be considered gifted in another culture (Ford, 1996). According to Schmitz and Galbraith (1985, p. 35), "Cultural heritage continues to influence how minority gifted develop and express their talents." Therefore, to focus on intellectual and academic ability without including performance may not be useful in defining giftedness for some cultural groups.

Kerr (1994), through counseling workshops and the American College Testing Assessment Program (ACT), worked with talented girls from many ethnic backgrounds. These ethnic groups consisted of African American young women from inner cities; Sioux young women in Nebraska; Pima, Navajo, and Apache young women in Arizona; and Hispanic young women from urban Arizona. Her study included information that emphasized how cultural aspects of an ethnic group may not be considered when identifying giftedness and giving support to minorities. She also discovered that it was

absolutely necessary to let the girls teach her about their culture; this method was essential in order to create a path for the young women to follow their goals while maintaining cultural connectedness.

Silverman (1993) suggested that female students are at risk for avoiding their talent as they struggle with the force of belonging. Girls, regardless of their ethnic group, run the risk of being considered "unfeminine" if they become too immersed in school achievement. As a result, gifted girls might underachieve intentionally as a trade-off for acceptance (Dowdall & Colangelo, 1982). All of these factors are prerequisites for academic failure and psychological problems.

It is not always one's race that defines cultural differences. Ford (1996) reported that within a culture, different people may have diverse learning, speaking, and behavioral styles. Socializing, traditions, values, and child rearing practices also vary from one culture to another. Additionally, diversity may include being bicultural, where one manipulates two cultures. The participants who were interviewed for this study identified with different races, and, in addition, they had culturally diverse backgrounds in education, and geographical locations during early childhood.

METHODS

This section contains a description of the methods that were used to complete the study. Included are the following: procedures, selection of participants, and data analysis.

Procedures

Qualitative methodology was used to identify and collect data from eight

gifted and talented females. By employing the major criteria of qualitative methodology, it was possible to listen to the participants narrate their past experiences, observe their behavior, and accumulate field notes.

The participants were interviewed individually in a face-to-face setting. To narrate their past experiences, the participants used eight open-ended questions as guidelines. The interview guide listed the following questions:

1. What can you tell me about your achievements during early childhood, perhaps during your elementary school years?
2. In what ways did your parents influence you to achieve?
3. How did you know, or who informed you that you had high potential?
4. During middle school, senior high school, and college, how did your parents' guidance influence your accomplishments?
5. In what way(s) did (do) your parents give you support during your early adult years?
6. What special ideas or recommendations (a quote, a suggestion, etc.) did (do) your parents give you that you recall from time to time, and how does this advice influence your daily life?
7. What are some things that you value highly?
8. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

After the taped interview, other data were collected by using a demographic questionnaire. This instrument consisted of eight survey questions.

The open-ended questions were designed to collect data to substantiate the research question: What parental influences were present during the

three human developmental stages, early childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood? It was also important to discover to what extent the participants believed that parental influences helped them to become successful achievers. The data were coded and examined to discover essential themes related to parental influences, gifted females, and achievement.

Selection of Participants

The search for participants included those who were age 20 years or over. They were working-class and professional individuals, they were highly accomplished, and they were diverse in preference, lifestyles, appearance, and careers.

As previously noted in the introduction, some of the participants were identified through the "Municipality Achievement Program for Women." Each year, the Municipality and a local petroleum corporation select several highly accomplished women and award them for their achievements. The selection was also the result of having knowledge of their talents, leadership positions, skills in the workplace and in the community, and recommendations by colleagues. In addition, the definition of giftedness was based on Renzulli's (1986) "Three Ring Model," which emphasizes above-average ability, task commitment, and creativity. Renzulli's definition of giftedness provided a foundation to reflect on creatively productive persons, primarily adults who have made valuable contributions to society. Additionally, Sternberg's (1997) theory and Gardner's (1985) theory were essential while identifying potential participants for the study. Sternberg's

theory is closely aligned to the culture because it is based on the values of the group's culture. The values that were listed by Sternberg to identify gifted individuals were excellence, rarity, productivity, demonstrability, and value. Sternberg also suggested that gifted persons have to be exceptionally good at something, their high level of a trait must be unparalleled in the face of their peers, this trait must lead to productivity, one or more tests must be used to validate the demonstrability of this trait, and this exceptional accomplishment must be valued by society. Gardner's (1985) theory contains eight intelligences: Verbal/Linguistic, Logical/Mathematical, Physical/Kinesthetic, Musical, Spatial, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, and naturalistic. The foregoing criteria provided the information that was necessary to construct a foundation from which to identify and qualify the potential participants for the study.

Data Analysis

The raw data from the participants were transcribed and coded. Crabtree and Miller (1992) provided a framework for summarizing the various approaches to data analysis. The categories are quasi-statistical, templates, editing, and immersion/crystallization. The template approach was used. In this approach, the text is analyzed through the use of an analysis guide or "codebook" consisting of a number of categories or themes relevant to the research question(s). Two characteristics were present to create a truly qualitative approach: The codebook was revised many times based on the textual data; second, the patterns of themes emerging were interpreted qualitatively, rather than statistically.

The codebook was developed from initial analysis of the interview data and the literature, referred to as a posteriori, which was the final procedure used to code and analyze the data.

The data were coded with three main stages of development in mind. The first stage explored parental influences during early childhood, the second stage explored parenting influences during adolescence, and the third stage explored parental influences during early adulthood.

MAJOR FINDINGS

This section contains the demographics, the introduction of the participants, a description of their accomplishments, and the major findings. The major findings are reported in the order in which they appeared due to the frequency of comments.

Demographics

The participants came from diverse backgrounds, both geographically and culturally. All of the participants were female; their ages ranged from the early 20s to the mid-60s. They were all born in different states of the United States, including the Midwest, Northeast, Northwest, South, and West. Six participants were African American, and two were Caucasian. Four participants were married, and four were single. Of the married participants, one had been married for 47 years, one for 40 years, one for 24 years, and one for 15 years.

Other demographics that were significant to the study included the following: Seven participants had graduated from college; the degree is pending for the eighth participant. The colleges were located in the

Midwest, Northeast, Northwest, and South. Some colleges were state colleges; others were prestigious universities. Two participants had bachelor of science degrees, one had a bachelor of music degree, two had master's degrees, and two had doctoral degrees (J.D. and Ph.D). Each participant had two or more family members who were either in college or had graduated from college. The participants had had several job experiences, professional and non-professional. Six of the eight participants were in different careers from each other. Their salary range was from $30,000 to $60,000 and over.

Description of Participants and Their Accomplishments

Each participant had numerous accomplishments. A brief description of the participants and some of their accomplishments follow:

Participant A: Angelina was born in the Northwest, and she attended college in the Southeast and Northeast, where she received a bachelor of music degree. Her accomplishments included being selected to be in the 1993-1994 edition of *Who's Who Among American High School Students*, being accepted into the program for The Exceptionally Gifted at age 15, having the lead role in the "Crazy For You" musical production at a local university, being called back for the Broadway production of "The Lion King," and winning performance awards for vocal renditions.

Participant B: Beverly was born in the Southeast, and she graduated from a college in the Southeast. She is a retired school teacher, a performing artist, and presently teaches voice lessons at her studio. Other accomplishments included concert performances as a soloist with several

symphonies, performing at the Kennedy Center, and performing with an opera company. Some of her awards are Teacher of Excellence, *Who's Who Among American Women, 1968*, and an Outstanding Service Award, 1993, from the local school district.

Participant C: Bernadette was born in the South, she has a bachelor of science degree, and her job experience consists of working as a nurse, a social worker, and a legislator. In January 2001, she was elected to a seat on the State Senate. She was honored by the local municipality and petroleum company for being an outstanding achiever.

Participant D: Catalina was born in the South. She is a graduate of an Ivy League school, and has a J.D. degree. Her awards and special achievements consist of American Colleges Technological Scientific Olympics (ACTSO) at Carnegie Mellon, where she competed in the arts and sciences. In law school, she received the Patricia Harris Scholarship.

Participant E: Franchesca was born in the Northeast. She started college at age 17, and she graduated at the age of 19. She has a Ph.D. and teaches at a local university. Franchesca's accomplishments include the following: She won essay contests in elementary school and sports trophies in swimming and bowling in high school. She wrote a book that was published last year.

Participant F: Joyce was born in the South. She attended private school, graduated with a B.S. degree from a university in the South, and later received a Master's Degree in Public Administration from a local university. Joyce is the current director of a local municipality department of

health and human services. During the National Business Women's Week 2000, the local Federation of Business and Professional Women celebrated Joyce's achievements.

Participant G: Karen was born in the Southeast. She received her B.S. degree from a college in the Southeast, and she received her MBA degree from a university in the Mideast. Additional accomplishments for Karen included being the Managing Partner for a large accounting firm. She is the first woman to become a Managing Partner in a Big Eight CPA Firm.

Participant H: Martha was born in the Northeast. One of her proudest moments was having her painting selected to represent Denver in the Winter Olympics in 1979. She attended college in the Northwest, and her degree is pending. She worked in the Governor's Office, and presently, she is an assemblywoman, recently reelected.

Major Themes

During the interview process with the participants, they were asked to narrate their stories according to how their parents influenced them to achieve when they were in their early childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. Therefore, the data that were coded and reported in the study came from the participants' perspectives. The themes are listed in the order in which the most responses were recorded. Some examples of responses by the participants have been included under each theme.

Theme 1: High Expectations

According to the participants, their parents had high expectations, and

these expectations were emphasized mainly in academics and behavior.

Participant A: Angelina shared her feelings about how her parents expected her to behave during her early childhood. She stated that they expected her to perform to the best of her ability academically, and she was also expected to behave well socially. In response to the open-ended question about the ways in which her parents influenced her to achieve, Angelina replied:

> My mom gave me little mathematical activities and puzzles and a variety of projects that would keep my mind stimulated outside of the school atmosphere as well, which provided for a more all-around education, which means that learning didn't only happen in the school environment, but it also happened in the home environment...During middle school, it was pretty much the same as elementary school. It was the development of support and making sure that I achieved good grades.

Participant E: Franchesca stated that her parents always had high expectations for her. She replied:

> I grew up in a family of four; I was the baby. We always had high expectations in our family for what we were to do...I was always on the honor roll...When I got my first "B" in fifth grade, I cried all the way home..."Oh, I got a 'B!'" My parents just expected us to do well..., and I strived for that expectation.

Franchesca explained that the community in which she grew up expected her to excel, also.

Theme 2: Support

The data showed substantial evidence that the participants received academic, emotional, and financial support. This support seemed to be extremely important for all of the participants.

Participant B: Beverly expressed her feelings about her grandparents' support after her mother passed away unexpectedly when she was 10 years old. A week after her mother's death, she and her grandparents were in court. She explained that the judge called her in and asked her with whom she wanted to live, her grandmother or her father, and she decided to stay with her grandmother because she would have food.

After Beverly entered college, her grandparents provided money for food and lodging. Because she had been evaluated to be gifted in music, she received a scholarship to attend a local college; therefore, she did not have to pay tuition.

On another occasion, her grandparents gave her support by keeping her children for a short time while she was teaching in a location that was too far away for her to commute back and forth every day.

Participant C: Bernadette was supported academically and emotionally by her parents and the community. Bernadette's adoptive mom gave her emotional support when she resented her natural mother because she thought she gave her away. Her adoptive mom explained to Bernadette that her natural mother was a teenager and could not keep her, and that she wanted the best for her.

Participant F: Joyce spoke about the support that she received from her grandmother when she was a child. Joyce's grandmother showed support by caring for her and spending time with her. Joyce explained:

> She was the person that my father said, "You are to take care of my child," and that's exactly what she understood,

> and I was attached to her body and soul, so to speak, for all the years that she lived and the time that I lived in New York and went through most of my elementary school years.

As Joyce grew older, she explained that the support she received in her early adult years was confusing, but that she always received recognition and love from her parents.

Theme 3: Encouragement

The participants recalled the frequent remarks of encouragement and advice that were given to them by their parents, grandparents, and teachers. Much of the advice was in the form of adages.

Participant D: Catalina's parents gave her extensive encouragement during her early years. Not only did her mother and father encourage her, but a family friend, a librarian, took an interest in her. The librarian encouraged Catalina to challenge herself with reading and to read many books. Catalina stated that it was more like a group effort. As far as advice was concerned, her parents advised her to give it her best effort in college, but also to be well-rounded, and to do different activities. Her mother emphasized that "There isn't anything you can't do if you set your mind to it."

Participant G: Karen spoke about several instances of encouragement during the discourse. She was always encouraged by her parents to make good grades and to work really hard at school. She added that her mom was very proud of her achievements, but her dad was definitely more influential. She stated:

> My mom was very proud of my achievements, but she wasn't necessarily the one that was encouraging. I was the oldest

> child and had a very close relationship with my father. He was the one who always said I could do whatever I wanted to do. He was more of the coach...He was very encouraging, and he always intellectually challenged me.

Karen explained that along with her dad, she had a very influential teacher who encouraged her even more than her dad. Her teacher would work long hours outside of school to keep up with the more challenging class that Karen had helped to formulate in elementary school.

When asked about a special quote or idea that was given to her by her parents, Karen replied, "You know that 30 or 40 years ago, girls didn't do a lot of things that women do now, but my dad didn't care if I was a boy or girl. I could do anything."

Theme 4: Guidance

An analysis of the data disclosed comments about the guidance that the participants received from their parents, friends of their parents, grandparents, other relatives, and childhood friends.

Participant F: Joyce received guidance from her grandmother when she was in elementary school, from her parents when she was in high school and college, and from the dean when she was in college. When Joyce's grandmother walked to school with her every day and stayed with her, she counted it as a unique experience. When she was in college, her parents guided her with advice and love, and she was afraid to fail. At the University, after spending her entire first semester playing pinochle, she was guided by her parents and the officials to attend another University. At that University, she was advised by a school official with the following

words: "Ms. Card, you have squandered more time than was useful,...and now you've really got to get to it."

Joyce was determined to finish college in four years, so she went to summer school. She stated that her parents advised her to accomplish and do whatever she had set out to do.

Participant G: In terms of guidance, Karen recalled that her father had a lot of influence over helping her identify her skills when she was in college and what a viable job would be. So, she counted this as an extremely helpful and encouraging time. After entering the business world, Karen spoke of her mentor who gave her guidance and who still works for the firm that is located in New York.

Theme 5: Role Models

Parents, grandparents, teachers, and church members were mentioned as role models by the participants. Several of the participants spoke directly about how much they admired a specific individual.

Participant A: Angelina explained that her role models were her mother and teachers, as well as professional artists, coaches, friends, and friends of her parents. She stated, "I would say also that people who took care of me at a young age: my babysitters, my aunts, and my cousins; those are mainly the people that informed me that I had potential."

Participant B: Beverly's role model was Miss Willis, who recognized her talent for music and gave her a role in the play, "Little Red Riding Hood," during elementary school. She remarked, "From then on, music was a part of my life, thanks to Miss Willis. Other role models in Beverly's life were

Miss Allen, her English teacher, who taught her to pronounce words correctly; Miss Cohen, who taught her to love poetry; Mr. Simmons, who taught her to love history; and Miss Dawson and Mr. Bartol, who taught her music and guided her during the adolescent years. Beverly stated:

> I was listening to the Metropolitan Opera, which was broadcast by Standard Oil. On Saturdays, we would go over to Mr. Bartol's house with a score. He would go to the White libraries and get the scores, and he taught us to read a score, so when I got to college, reading a score was not difficult.

Beverly also spoke about her grandparents and how much she admired them for helping her by taking care of her children while she sought employment as a teacher. She explained:

> They kept my children while I sought employment...I went to teach in Virginia...My husband was stationed in Michigan... I found a house to rent, and my children returned to me in September, so once again, my grandparents and aunt helped out...You know, now it's a statistic as to the number of grandparents who are rearing grandchildren. In those days, there was never any question. They did it all the time. It was just a part of our lifestyle, and not that of a statistic, either.

In addition, Beverly explained why her teachers were her role models. "They were her teachers in elementary school and in Sunday School," she stated.

Participant H: Martha's role models were her parents, teachers, and a counselor. Martha made the following remarks about her parents: "They always told us that we were special kids. My mom was a teacher. And then throughout school, we were very fortunate in that our teachers felt that way

just as well."

Theme 6: Reading

The results indicated that reading for achievement and for emotional needs was a very important part of the participants' daily activities during their early childhood.

Participant B: Beverly spoke about how she began to read during her early childhood. She stated:

> My grandparents were 60...So they were tired, and I don't remember love...I don't remember ever being told or held or made to feel secure. I lost myself, after my mother's death, in books. We had to walk to the old Carnegie Library. Every African American neighborhood had a Carnegie Library...I lost and immersed myself in books, and I didn't have to think.

Participant C: Bernadette spoke candidly about reading during the course of the conversation at the interview. She stated:

> I just want to say how much I believe that learning is lifelong, and I try to instill this in my children and into my grandchildren. I've got one or two that do not read as much as I would like them to, but I know the key to anything is being able to read well and understand what you read and have a love for that.

Participant D: Catalina's school librarian encouraged her to read more challenging books. She stated, "The librarian pulled me aside one day and said, "Well, do you always want to read these books?" ...Up until then, I chose books that I liked, but she encouraged me to challenge myself with reading."

Summary of Major Findings

The major findings in this study were specific patterns that repeated

themselves throughout the data for the participants. The participants had numerous accomplishments.

1. High expectations of them from parents and other adults, beginning at an early age, appeared to be the strongest of all of the categories. High expectations for each participant were either stated directly or implied.

2. Support from adults appeared to be the second strongest category. Participants were supported in academics, in emotional situations, and in their financial needs. In most cases, both parents showed a great interest in providing support by spending time with their daughters.

3. After support, the third largest category was encouragement. Within this category, all of the parents and/or teachers showed encouragement and offered advice. Many times, this advice was in the form of adages.

4. Guidance was fourth. Several of the parents and teachers guided the participants during their early childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. For example, Beverly, one of the participants and a music student, was taught how to read scores while in high school, and when she entered college, she stated that it was not difficult to read scores because she had been trained while she was in high school.

5. All participants referred to their role models. They spoke about how they admired either their parents or their teachers or both. Family friends were also included as role models.

6. Sixth, reading was important to the participants. In most cases, high interest in reading was noted for the participants during their early childhood days.

Additionally, findings supported Gardner's (1985) theory on multiple intelligences. The participants excelled in more than one area. It was interesting to discover that six of the eight participants either skipped a

grade or grades before moving on to college, or they were moved to advanced classes at an early age. The data also provided information to indicate that the participants were high achievers during early childhood.

All of the participants and their parents valued education. In addition, the participants shared their own personal values. Some of these values were honesty, trust, dreams, leadership, travel, love, independence, loyalty, diversity, and quality relationships.

CONCLUSIONS

The goal of this study was to explore the parental influences that nurtured the achievement of gifted and talented females from culturally diverse backgrounds. The open-ended questions that were listed previously served as guidelines for the participants to tell how their parents had influenced their achievements. Further, the open-ended questions for the interview were constructed by using three developmental stages. They were "Early Childhood," "Adolescence," and "Young Adulthood." These stages served as a structural map for the participants to organize their reflections. This study only included girls and women and gifted and talented females.

Several major findings emerged. The participants started achieving at an early age and continued achieving as they moved through the three stages of their human growth. The data suggested that parental influences during the early years of a child's development were important factors in determining whether or not that child would be a successful achiever in her personal and professional life. Therefore, the high expectations, the

support, the encouragement, guidance, role models, and reading for achievement must be structured strategically and maintained systematically during the child's developmental stages. If the structure and planning for the child's future is not in place, the child will most likely have severe problems on an emotional level, underachieve in the academics, succumb to peer pressure, and work in jobs that are way below their potential.

Other important findings illustrated how the participants had internalized parental influence and sought to become high achievers. As stated previously, six out of eight of the participants either skipped a grade level to enter college or advanced to a higher level class within their high school. Their parents and teachers had recognized their talents and had encouraged them to explore their talents. "The motivation to achieve is not inborn but is developed" (Johnson, 1984, p. 11).

Since the females in this study were successful achievers, they are role models for other females. It was important to discover how they became high achievers; it was also important to pass this information on to other parents so that they are able to use parental influences to help their daughters achieve academically, socially, and emotionally. This is not an easy task for parents; therefore, this study was intended to not only discover themes, but to conceptualize them and to propose recommendations for practice.

Recommendations for Practice

The recommendations for practice are as follows:

1. Parents must have high expectations for their children from early

childhood to early adulthood. If the parents have high expectations, the child will have high expectations. In this same context, parents must dispel myths that undermine their child's expectations.

2. Parents need to establish continual support during the early years of their child's growth. This support should not be in the form of pressure or fear.

3. Parents must encourage their children to accept their giftedness. In addition, parents must teach their gifted daughters to empower themselves to reach their full potential.

4. Parents must guide their daughters to become leaders and to prepare themselves to compete in an increasingly technologically complex world.

5. Parents must act as role models. The most powerful influence that parents have is through their example. By being examples, parents are modeling the behaviors they want their child to develop.

6. Parents must provide opportunities for their children to read at an early age. Additionally, they must help their children enjoy reading many books on different subjects, and encourage them to become lifelong readers.

Suggestions for Further Research

An evaluation of the study indicated the need for further research in the area of parental expectations and a child's interpretation of those expectations. How many parents actually verbalize their expectations? Since this is a lack of communication, a serious problem could ensue. For

example, Bernadette's (Participant C) parents wanted her to become a teacher; however, she wanted to become a nurse and social worker. She ended up attending a college that was primarily structured for teachers. For awhile, this was a serious problem for Bernadette because she did not want to go against her parents' wishes. A qualitative and quantitative study would be a recommendation.

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